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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2504

October 15, 2003

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The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert and Democratic Leader Pelosi,

For several years now, farmers and ranchers in Missouri and throughout the nation have been hit hard by prolonged drought conditions. Let me take this means to encourage your support for emergency disaster assistance so that agriculture producers can recoup significant production losses caused by drought and other severe weather conditions in 2003.

As you know, the 2002 omnibus farm bill provided a meaningful safety net for America's farmers to assist them when agricultural markets become depressed. However, the counter-cyclical measures that were enacted as part of this legislation do not provide assistance to producers when Mother Nature's wrath destroys their fields, diminishes their water supplies, and damages their herds of livestock. Earlier this year, Congress stepped up to the plate as it approved \$3.1 billion in drought assistance for the 2001 and 2002 growing seasons. I was proud to join my colleagues in supporting this effort to assist the men and women who provide a high quality, reliable, and affordable food supply for the American people and for those who live around the world.

Unfortunately, throughout the 2003 growing season, severe drought has continued to negatively impact producers. This year, portions of the Show-Me State have continued to experience a disastrous combination of higher than normal temperatures and little measurable precipitation. In Missouri's Fourth Congressional District and many other areas of the state, row crops – especially corn and soybeans – took a real hit this year. In addition, pasture land has been scorched and ponds and wells have become dry.

Recently, the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (FAPRI) at the University of Missouri estimated that economic losses in Missouri due to this year's drought would be \$399 million for corn, sorghum, and soybeans. These losses

highlight why Congress should act to diminish the negative impact of drought to Missouri's farmers and to our economic well-being.

I urge you to support general crop and livestock disaster assistance for losses encountered in the 2003 growing year. In addition, I press upon you to provide emergency federal resources for the Emergency Conservation Program, or ECP, which would assist farmers and ranchers in repairing agricultural land damaged by natural disasters and in carrying out water enhancement measures during severe droughts; for the guaranteed loan program; and for the Livestock Feed Assistance Program.

Recently, J. B. Penn, the Under Secretary of Agriculture for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services, wrote to me stating that the U.S. Department of Agriculture fully supports any member of Congress making an effort to present an emergency appropriations bill that would provide the necessary funding for ECP. I have enclosed Under Secretary Penn's correspondence for your review, and I hope you will consider it a sign that the Administration is willing to work with Congress on this issue that is important to rural Missourians.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to working with you in the days ahead to make certain our farmers and ranchers get the attention they deserve during these difficult times.

With kindest regards, I remain

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ike Skelton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

IKE SKELTON
Member of Congress

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Enclosure